From: Joshua Powell <Josh@thepowellhousepress.com>

To: matt.murell@columbiacountyny.gov

Date: February 12, 2026, 2:49 PM

Subject: Press Inquiry: Questions Regarding Resolutions 69-2026 and 70-2026 and Related Matters

Dear Chairman Murell:

My name is Joshua Powell. I am a journalist currently reporting on matters related to the Columbia County Board of Supervisors' approval of Resolutions 69-2026 and 70-2026, which added properties to Agricultural Districts #9 and #10, and the associated SEQRA negative declaration. I am also reporting on the development project of Dr. Edwin Williams at 509 Bashford Road in Chatham and the various regulatory and land use proceedings surrounding that property. I am writing to give you an opportunity to respond to several questions before my next article on Wednesday, February 18th, 2026.

On the Agricultural District Vote

1. Can you confirm which properties were added to Agricultural Districts #9 and #10 under Resolutions 69-2026 and 70-2026? Specifically, was Dr. Edwin Williams' property at 509 Bashford Road in Chatham among them?

2. A public hearing on these additions was held on January 6th. How was that hearing publicized, and do you believe adequate public notice was provided to affected residents and neighboring property owners?

3. Two supervisors were absent from last night's vote — Donal Collins of Chatham and Timothy Ooms of Kinderhook. Were you made aware in advance that either supervisor would be absent? Did either offer you a reason?

On Supervisor Collins' Potential Conflict of Interest

4. Are you aware that Chatham Town Supervisor Donal Collins has a business relationship with Dr. Edwin Williams — specifically, that Collins leases land from or adjacent to Dr. Williams' residential property on Bashford Road?

5. Has Supervisor Collins ever disclosed this financial relationship to the Board of Supervisors, to you as Chairman, or in any formal filing?

6. Has Supervisor Collins ever recused himself from any Board of Supervisors discussion or vote involving Dr. Williams' property, the Fox Hill Vineyard, or the agricultural district additions?

7. If a sitting supervisor has an undisclosed financial relationship with a property owner whose land is being added to an agricultural district, do you believe that raises concerns under New York General Municipal Law Article 18?

8. As Chairman, do you have an obligation to ensure that conflicts of interest among board members are identified and addressed? What steps, if any, have you taken regarding Supervisor Collins and this matter?

On the SEQRA Negative Declaration

9. The Board issued a negative declaration under SEQRA for these agricultural district additions, bypassing a full Environmental Impact Statement. What analysis or documentation supported that determination?

10. Who served as lead agency for the SEQRA review, and what environmental factors were evaluated before the negative declaration was issued?

11. Several of the properties potentially added to these agricultural districts sit in or near residential areas where neighbors have raised concerns about environmental impacts. Why was a full EIS not warranted?

12. Are you familiar with the history of the Dewey Loeffel Landfill Superfund site near Nassau Lake — where inadequate oversight of land use and industrial activity led to PCB contamination that now flows through the Valatie Kill into Kinderhook Lake, with fish consumption advisories still in effect decades later? As Chairman of the Board of Supervisors, does that example inform your thinking about the importance of thorough environmental review before changing land use classifications in the county?

On Process and Oversight

13. What role did the Columbia County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board play in reviewing these additions? Did that board evaluate whether each property met the threshold for legitimate agricultural use?

14. Dr. Williams' Fox Hill Estate is assessed at approximately $4.5 million and reportedly produces, at best, twelve cases of wine per year. If this property was included in the agricultural district additions, does that level of production concern you as a matter of whether it constitutes a bona fide agricultural operation?

15. The Board's resolution now goes to the NYS Commissioner of Agriculture and Markets for certification. Did the Board provide the Commissioner with any supporting documentation regarding the agricultural viability of the properties added?

16. Critics have characterized Dr. Williams' project as a years-long effort to secure commercial use of residential land — evolving from a wedding venue proposal to a vineyard and tasting room, and now potentially to agricultural district protections. As Chairman, do you believe the Board has an obligation to examine the full history of a property's applications before granting additional classifications and protections?

17. Do you believe the residents of Chatham and the surrounding neighborhoods have been adequately heard throughout this process?

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Joshua Powell (518) 567-8300